

TOPIC: Factor GMO 'World's Largest International Study on GMO Safety' claims

UPDATED: 12 November 2014

Events to Date:

2012

- **September 29** – In response to the threatened retraction of the Seralini rat study, Russian anti-GMO NGO [National Association for Genetic Safety \(NAGS\)](#) director [Elena Sharoykina](#) [tells Russia Television \(RT\)](#) that researchers are planning their own “*public experiment reality show*” that will “*prove or deny GMO’s health-threatening influence.*” They claimed that web cameras, installed in cages with rats, would broadcast all stages of the experiment online and be available on the Internet 24/7 worldwide. The RT report claimed, ‘*These Russian scientists, who oppose genetically modified organisms (GMO) in food, expect that their year-long experiment will show whether the controversial cultivation process has effects as dangerous as French revelations claimed on September 19.*’ NAGS reported the research would be launched in March 2013 and would cost up to US\$1 million raised through commercial sponsors, government grants and internet financing. Additional [details of the study were reported by the Natural Society here](#). (Note: this reported study and GMO testing reality show have not materialized as of 11/2014.)

2013

- **December 7** – In an article entitled [Genetic mutated plants kill people](#) Elena Sharoykina tells the Voice of Russia: “The Russian National Association of Genetic Safety has decided that it was time to put an end to that dispute: to ban GMOs, if they are harmful, or appease the people, if there is no danger, Director of the Association Elena Sharoykina told the Voice of Russia. “*We must carry out an experiment based on the rules, which opponents and proponents of GMOs as well as those, who are indifferent to this technology, will agree upon. This year, we carried out a great work with participation of international and Russian scientists. In the summer, we were visited by specialists from the USA, France, and Great Britain. A working group was established. Today, the protocols are ready. I think this experiment will become a global sensation, because until now, during 20 years of commercial use of GMOs, nobody in the world has united scientists of different countries and different scientific disciplines in order to fully, with absolute certainty investigate GMOs’ impact on organisms.*”

2014

- **May 17** – RT reports [Russian anti-GMO activists raise funds for ‘first-ever’ independent intl research](#) noting about NAGS, “*The NGO has already enrolled a team of researchers from the US, France, the UK, China and Russia and will make sure the experiment will comply with all international standards. It’s also going to be available for everyone to follow online. The GSPA is raising funds from as many sources as possible for the experiment to come up to the group’s claims – the first-ever independent international research on GMO.*”
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- **May 22** – The Natural Society reports [Russian Activists to Conduct Independent Studies Proving GMOs Could be Genetic Weapon](#) quoting Elena Sharoykina stating “**that GMO could be used as a genetic weapon...**” supporting a Russian bill that would criminalize the planting of GMOs. Adding, “*The GSPA is raising funds from multiple sources as a means to conduct – the first-ever independent international research on GMO*” to have some hard, solid evidence that can counteract the propaganda which has been circulated by Monsanto’s shills.
- **July 11** – [FactorGMO.com](#) domain name registered to [National Association for Genetic Safety \(NAGS\)](#) director Elena A. Sharoykina in Moscow. This website currently has one page announcing the Factor GMO report will be issued on November 11, 2014.
- **August 6** – [FactorGMO.eu](#) domain name registered to NAGS director [Elena Sharoykina](#) at address: 2 Willow Road, SL30BS Slough, UK (Note: this is the address for [Norsk Global Wholesale, LTD](#) – a cargo and export consultancy). This website is current set up as a protected WordPress (blog platform) site with no content other than a login page.
- **October 22** – [Henry Rowlands](#) via Sustainable Pulse reports claim he “[received a media advisory regarding the launch of a \\$25 Million international study on GMO and pesticide safety in Central London, UK on November 11.](#)” Noting, “*Henry Rowlands, Sustainable Pulse’s Director, stated Wednesday; ‘It is with optimism that I welcome this opportunity to find out the full truth about the possible harm caused by GMOs and pesticides to human health. This is the Ultimate Study that we have all waited 20 years for. I have always supported ‘neutral’ science.’ Sustainable Pulse will keep our readers updated with all of the details surrounding the study when they are announced.*” This post includes announced location change “*due to the amount of interest according to the Factor GMO organizers.*”
- **October 23** – GM Watch (an affiliate of Henry Rowlands and co-member of Global GMO-Free Coalition) [posts Factor GMO press release](#) including location change update. Some [agriculture trade publications](#) and other [anti-GMO advocacy groups](#), alternative and [natural health marketing](#) sites similarly syndicate the Rowlands article.
- **October 28** – Biology Fortified blogger Karl Haro von Mogel posts, “[Questions arise about upcoming ‘Factor GMO’ study](#)” raising issues of predetermined outcomes and bias with NAGS study
- **November 3** – Genetic Literacy Project director Jon Entine published “[\\$25 million for ‘Factor GMO’ study – Are the results pre-determined?](#)”
- **November 10** – Genetic Literacy Project publishes [profile on Factor GMO study sponsor NAGS](#)
- **November 11** – Factor GMO press conference in London with livestreaming via [NAGS YouTube channel](#) and newly launched [Facebook fan page](#) and [Twitter account](#) (see summary below for details). The announcement coincided with the delivery of an anti-GMO

campaign¹ “[Letter from America](#)” to UK elected officials signed by various celebrities, alternative health and organic food advocates.

News reports include:

- o [World’s largest inquiry into safety of GM crops will use thousands of rats and cost £15.6million](#), by Sean Poulter for the UK Daily Mail
- o [Largest international study into safety of GM food launched by Russian NGO](#), by John Vidal for the UK Guardian (Syndicated by multiple other news and advocacy sources, e.g. [Russia Insider](#) and [EcoNews Today](#))
- o [\\$25m GMO and pesticide safety study launched](#), By Margaret Donnelly for Agriland
- o [New study seeks to settle, once and for all, debates about GMOs](#), by Carrie Gillam for Reuters (Note: this Reuters report received moderate syndication by mainstream online news sites.)
- o [New \\$25 million study will look at GMOs’ impact on health](#), by Kelly Moffitt for the St. Louis Business Journal
- o [Keith Good: ‘Factor GMO’ Study to Take Comprehensive Look at Issue](#), by Keith Good for AgFax
- o [Comment: Doubts raised on ‘neutrality’ of Factor GMO study](#), by Alan Bullion for Agra Europe.

Initial advocacy response and amplification:

- o [\\$25 Million GMO and Pesticide Safety Study Launched in London](#), by Henry Rowlands for Sustainable Pulse
- o [Joint press release: Global GMO Free Coalition Set to Help Fund World’s Largest GMO Safety Study](#), by Henry Rowlands for Global GMO Free and Katherine Paul for Organic Consumers Association (Syndicated by multiple ‘indy news’ and environmental advocacy sources, e.g., [RINF Alternative News](#) (RU), [Gastronomia](#) (ESP) and [Keine Gentechnik](#) (DE))

BACKGROUND:

According to a report on October 22, 2014 GMO-Free Global Coalition coordinator Henry Rowlands, via his publishing arm Sustainable Pulse, an *independent* and international consortium of science and NGO advocacy organizations would announce the first “independent and fully transparent” health study of GMOs and pesticides on November 11, 2014. This purportedly ‘world’s largest independent’ study on GMO and pesticide safety was being promoted as costing US\$25 million.

This study was initiated and orchestrated by Russian anti-GMO NGO National Association for Genetic Safety (NAGS) or the OAGB (Общенациональная Ассоциация Генетической Безопасности ОАГБ - also called the Genetic Safety Public Association-GSPA); however, study spokesman Ivan Lambert claims, “NAGS *has no and will have no involvement in designing the study, in the day-to-day running of the experiment, or in the gathering, interpretation, or publication of the scientific results.*” NAGS is a member of the GMO-Free Global Coalition

¹ ~~The Letter from America website and campaign materials do not disclose the names of their organizations and sponsors; however, the site resides on a dedicated server which hosts only two other domains: <http://www.beyond-gmo.org> and <http://www.gmffreeme.org> also anonymous sites otherwise registered to Beyond GM, LTD.~~

which first promoted the study press conference announcement, and the public record, website registrations and past statements by NAGS dating back to 2012 appear to contradict this claim of independence.

In addition to the prior statements by NAGS showing they are behind this pending study report, media interviews with NAGS director Elena Sharoykina indicate a pre-determined outcome and anti-GMO bias as reported by both Biology Fortified and the Genetic Literacy Project. Further, initial reports by NAGS claimed this study would cost up to US\$1 million and be done with complete transparency – including live web streaming video. In addition to cost claims and independent source, NAGS has also reported conflicting details on the scope, protocols and timing involved in the study.

The goal of this announcement appears to be an attempt to erode public confidence in the existing science around the safety of plant biotechnology. When first launched, The GMO-Free Global Coalition indicated it would be engaged in this type of ‘research’ tactic and all evidence available strongly suggests this study release is neither independent nor neutral.

A likely goal of this public relations tactic will be to try and engage ‘industry’ responses to create an “us vs. them” scenario to perpetuate anti-GMO advocacy s that only non-independent industry ‘tobacco science’ has driven current biosafety regulations and GMO approvals. As such, academic and appropriate NGOs sources would be the most effective response sources when and if any mainstream media cover these claims.

Press Conference & Updated Press Materials:

Study facilitators conducted a press conference at the St James’ Court Hotel in London at 14:30 GMT on November 11, 2014 with simultaneous release of [updated press materials](#). The press conference was attended by about 25-30 people including NAGS and Global GMO-Free coalition staff, other activist group representatives and individuals and journalists. The presenting panel representing the GMO Factor study included:

- **Elena Sharoykina**, head of NAGS and co-chair of Global GMO-Free coalition
- **Bruce Blumberg**, PhD biology, University of California Irvine. Blumberg coined the term “[obesogens](#)” and has been criticized for [his claims about BPA](#) and other endocrine-related health risk allegations
- **Fiorella Belpoggi**, director and Chief of Pathology at the Cesare Maltoni Cancer Research Centre of the Ramazzini Institute in Bentivoglio, Italy. Belpoggi is a member of [ENNSER and signer of their statement](#) claiming that there is no scientific consensus on GMO safety. She is also an aspartame critic who [claims it causes cancer](#) and whose work is promoted by the alternative health, dietary supplements and natural products industries.
- **Oxana Sinitsyna**, Deputy Director for Science at the Federal State Organization “A. N. Sysin Research Institute of Human Ecology and Environmental Health” of the Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation, Moscow, Russia

The press conference lasted approximately two hours involving brief introductions from the panel members followed by a longer introduction, in Russian with local translation, by Sharoykina. Only two named journalists posed questions, the majority of other questions and comments came from self-described anti-GMO activists from both the U.K. and the U.S., a representative of the Soil Association (the U.K. organic trade organization), Henry Rowlands representing

Sustainable Pulse and someone claiming to be a GMO advisor to the EU parliament. Key points conveyed during the question and answer session:

- The projected **start date for the research is March 2015** and the group claims to have received **funding commitments of nearly US\$25 million from “private donors” whom they declined to name stating “contractual obligations”** prevented such disclosure at this time. They said they would disclose donor information sometime in 2015. They also noted they still needed to raise additional funds to close the gap and ensure they had the resources needed to start the first rounds of research needs anticipated in the spring.
- **They reported that the study protocols and methodology** have been decided; however, they are not yet being released. The panel members would only state that study participants operating at undisclosed laboratories around the world would follow “OECD-plus” protocols and research guidelines. They reported the research will involve long-term animal feeding trials using a reported 6,000 Spragues Dawley rats fed one undisclosed Monsanto variety of GMO corn, glyphosate, and an undescribed control group. They claimed the studies will test the rats for toxicity, carcinogenicity and multi-generational developmental factors related to endocrine disruption. When asked if the study “raw data” would be reported, panelist Blumberg only responded that it would be nice if the reporters would ask the other study publishers if they would release their raw data.
- On **rationale, transparency and bias** - Blumberg added he believed these longer term studies had been conducted by GMO and pesticide companies but that they’ve not been disclosed implying the companies are aware of negative health risks so this study is necessary. Blumberg also noted that billions of pounds of GMOs and pesticides have been consumed during a time which correlates with increased incidence of virtually every chronic disease so their study is designed to definitively answer the questions and concerns about correlation. He and the panel said their science would stand on its own and thus address any concerns about bias.

Sample MESSAGES for consideration:

1. The existing, extensive and long-term published peer reviewed research supporting the safety of plant biotechnology is not questioned by credible experts, independent health professional association and government regulators throughout the globe. (*See additional resources for references.*)
 2. Sound science is not conducted by staged advocacy group press conferences promoting future research results looking for negative outcomes, rather through actual published findings of independent peer review and replication conducted by multiple unbiased sources.
 3. This anti-GMO advocacy-group coordinated study scheme is neither the first nor the largest such undertaking as alleged. Numerous independent, long term and larger studies of GMO safety have in fact been conducted, including the 2011 €300m European Commission’s report over 130 research projects, involving 500 independent research groups, over a 25
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year period which found no scientific evidence associating GMOs with higher risks for the environment or for food and feed safety than conventional plants and organisms.

4. This anti-GMO coalition and their Russian NGO partner have a history of irresponsible, false and misleading claims about GMO and pesticide safety which negates their credibility and any claims of un-biased independence.

QUOTES:

- “We have reviewed the scientific literature on GE crop safety for the last 10 years that catches the scientific consensus matured since GE plants became widely cultivated worldwide, and we can conclude that the scientific research conducted so far has not detected any significant hazard directly connected with the use of GM crops.” Department of Applied Biology, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Perugia, Perugia, Italy and Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry Policies (MiPAAF) [published study, September 2013, J. Critical Reviews in Biotechnology](#)
- “The scientific evidence indicates clearly that the health, wellbeing, and productivity of animals consuming GE feeds are at least comparable to those of animals consuming conventional feeds.” – [Gregory S. Lewis, PhD, Editor in Chief, Journal of Animal Science.](#)
- “The (research) comparisons revealed that the genetic modification has less impact on plant gene expression and composition than that of conventional plant breeding. Moreover, environmental factors (such as field location, sampling time, or agricultural practices) have a greater impact than transgenesis. None of these ‘-omics’ profiling studies has raised new safety concerns about GE varieties; neither did the long-term and multigenerational studies on animals. **Therefore, there is no need to perform such long-term studies in a case-by-case approach, unless reasonable doubt still exists after conducting a 90-day feeding test.**” Agnes E. Riccio, Chair of Evolutionary Genetics and Plant Breeding, AgroParis Tech, University of Paris-Sud. [Research Paper published May 2013, New Biotechnology.](#)
- “The NAGS has a questionable history when it comes to scientific claims about genetically engineered crops.” [Karl Haro von Mogel, PhD – Biology Fortified](#)
- “There is a global expert academic and regulatory consensus that there is no scientific reason to believe plant biotechnology bred crops pose any new or different risks than conventionally bred plant varieties. This purported video webcast approach to represent transparency described by NAGS would make a circus out of serious science. This is a publicity stunt intended to create the impression that needed studies haven’t been done – which more than 20 years of accepted scientific literature, peer reviewed publication and extensive regulatory reviews clearly shows and supports the safety of GMOs..” [Bruce Chassy, PhD – Academics Review.](#)

Additional RESOURCES:

- [New Scientific Review Concludes No Adverse Effects of Genetically Engineered Feeds in Livestock Animals](#), American Society of Animal Scientists, Alison Van Eenennaam, PhD., 2014.

- [Biology Fortified – GENERA database of studies on biotech](#)
- Genetic Literacy Project: [With 2000+ global studies affirming safety, GM foods among most analyzed subjects in science](#), October 2014
- The [European Commission published a report](#) summarizing the results of 50 research projects addressing the safety of GMOs for the environment as well as for animal and human health. These projects received funding of €200 million from the EU and are part of a 25-year long research effort on GMOs.
- 2013 – [An overview of the last 10 years of genetically engineered crop safety research](#) published in Critical Reviews in Biotechnology
- In 2012, a [literature review](#) (Snell C, Berheim A, Berge´ JB, Kuntz M, Pascal G, Paris A, et al. Assessment of the health impact of GE plant diets in long term and multigenerational animal feeding trials: a literature review. Food and Chemical Toxicology 2012;50(3–4):1134–48.) of well-designed, long-term and multigenerational animal feeding studies comparing GM and non-GM potatoes, soy, rice, corn and triticales found that GM crops and their non-GM counterparts are nutritionally equivalent and can be safely used in food and feed.